

Appropriations Committee, Hearing on Budget Cuts

My name is Brita Darany von Regensburg and I am the founder and president of the Friends of Autistic People, FAP, headquartered in Greenwich CT. Our well-known mission is to advocate for everyone on the autism spectrum after they age out of the school system.

The Governor's budget cuts have a great impact on everyone on the spectrum - but this time I wish to talk as the mother of my grown daughter Vanessa who has profound autism and lives in a group home managed by a private provider.

Vanessa has lived there for over 10 years now and over the years we have seen how budget cutbacks had an enormous impact on the service she is given in the home. The staff gets paid minimum wages and hardly ever receive a raise. As a result, we see an unbelievable staff and house management turnover.

Because of inadequate funding the organization can hardly provide the State mandated training for new staff and barely any autism specific training that is not mandated. As we all know everyone on the spectrum needs consistency and routine. With constantly changing staff where new managers have no idea what was done before and what is needed now the turnover has very serious negative impact on my daughter's life. For example Vanessa has learned to eat with fork and knife, yet new staff would pre-cut her food and give her only a spoon to feed herself like a baby. They reduce her self-esteem and make her unfit to eat in public. Vanessa is nonverbal yet those who know her can understand her individual signs and body language. When untrained staff comes, she is often misunderstood, not paid attention to, and is reduced to only communicating about food - this increases her frustration which leads to screaming and hitting her care takers and house mates .

The planned \$25 million cuts in the DDS budget will undoubtedly lead to further staff reduction at the home, more turnover, even lower quality service. There will be fewer individual trips to the community, doctors' appointments will be missed even more due to the cutback in van availability and Vanessa's quality of life will be impacted even more negatively. Our community based group home, which was touted as such an improvement from institutions for those with classic

autism has become more like life in a mini-institution in the “community”. More and more the 6 nonverbal house mates, all with profound autism and very different needs, will be herded around and just babysat. Their needs can hardly be met with the present staffing and training levels. The new budget cuts will make us parents even more afraid to die as that will most likely lead our child to just sit around and lose one skill after another.

Governor Malloy, if Vanessa could speak she herself would tell you:

Please restore the \$25 million to the budget so that my life can be more normal like that of YOUR children.